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Students as teachers: What faculty learn by living on campus

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Students as Teachers: What Faculty Learn by Living on Campus



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IN ITS RECENT HISTORY, American higher education has segmented the student experience, especially as research universities have grown in size and complexity. To increase the integration of undergraduate learning experiences, many efforts have combined the curricular and cocurricular worlds of students. In one practice, housing and residence life staff invite faculty members to live with students in residence halls and participate in the leadership of those communities. While research has found faculty-in-residence programs to positively impact students, what is the impact on faculty? This study examined the impact that living in residence has on faculty, their pedagogy, and their philosophy of education. Six faculty-in-residence representing six different academic disciplines at a single institution participated in this study. The resulting Faculty-in-Residence Development Model describes important ways in which faculty are influenced by a more holistic and integrated approach to learning.

"What is noteworthy and downright radical is how much I am learning, not necessarily about my subject area but about how students learn and about myself as a teacher."

Scholars suggest that one consequence of the growing complexity of higher education institutions in the United States is the inadequate quality of faculty interaction with students, particularly outside the classroom (Klein, 2000; Tagg, 2003; Tinto, 2000). Based on research that reveals the positive impact that faculty engagement has on student learning, reformers of undergraduate education advocate for efforts to integrate academic and experiential learning by means of living-learning programs, residential colleges, and faculty-in-residence programs, as well as residential facilities for classes, faculty offices, and academic services (Astin, 1993b; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schroeder, 2003; Shushok & Sriram, 2010; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2004). Although these programs have been studied in conjunction with the student experience, little research has been conducted on how these programs may also transform faculty.

Changing faculty attitudes, including their understanding of students, helps shape pedagogy, philosophy, and behavior. For example, Pamela Johnston (2007) remarked that her life in a student residential community at the University of Missouri continued to influence her teaching methods and perception of her role as an educator long after her live-in role ended. Thomas Klein (2000), director of Chapman Learning Community and professor of English at Bowling Green State University, acknowledged, "What is noteworthy and downright radical is how much I am learning, not necessarily about my subject area but about how students learn and about myself as a teacher" (p. 17). After living for 9 years in a residence hall at UCLA, Robert Rhoads (2009) asserted that community life is "aimed at helping students form the connections and social support systems that are helpful for academic success" (p. 20).

Despite the power of these reflections to convey what faculty members gained from living with students, they are anecdotal in nature. The present study examined part of one university's efforts to strengthen student learning through a faculty-in-residence program for tenured or tenure-track faculty members. While the primary purpose of the program was related to student engagement, a secondary outcome and the focus of this study was its apparent impact on faculty.

The program began in 2004 with one faculty member in residence; by the time of this study, the number had increased to seven. Faculty in this program were asked to live full-time in a residential community in order to increase student-faculty interaction, bridge curricular and cocurricular worlds, and foster a sense of mentorship and belonging among students. For each opening, all faculty members at the institution received a call for applications. A committee of student affairs professionals, current faculty-in-residence, and faculty members not living in residence jointly recommended one candidate for selection as the next faculty-in-residence. The program's supervision continues to reside in the division of student affairs, and the provost and the vice president for student affairs jointly approve each appointment. As part of their faculty-in-residence annual review, faculty members created portfolios describing the ways they fostered community life and the outcomes they had for students and themselves. The richness of these portfolios and their recognition of faculty learning served as

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the springboard for our research. This study sought to examine in what ways, and to what extent, living in residence influences faculty learning and development.

METHODS

Site and Participant Selection

This study occurred at a large, private research institution in the Southwest. Researchers invited the faculty-in-residence to participate in a study that would consist of a more in-depth review of their portfolios and follow-up qualitative interviews. Six faculty members accepted the invitation to participate, and their initial portfolios, subsequent written questionnaire responses, and resulting findings comprise the current study. These participants represented the academic disciplines of education, engineering and computer science, history, music, philosophy, and theater arts. Four were female, and two were male. Each had been in his or her role for at least one year, and five of the six faculty members were tenured.

Data Collection

The data collection for this qualitative investigation took place in two phases. First, faculty-in-residence participated in their usual portfolio preparation exercise which is designed to help them reflect upon their roles and experiences of the past academic year. The researchers asked faculty to include the following in their portfolios:

1. A report of progress toward achieving the faculty-in-residence's goals for the year
2. Proposed goals of the faculty-in-residence for the upcoming year
3. Evaluations from three students selected by the faculty-in-residence and living in the residential community during the year of review (a form was provided)
4. A letter from the academic dean or department chair expressing the faculty member's level of support and leadership for the community if the position was part of a broader living-learning program
5. Any supporting documents or highlights from the year

Additionally, the residence hall director working in the same community with the faculty member submitted an evaluation, one that was not shared directly with the faculty-in-residence in order to ensure an honest evaluation from the residence life professional. Once these portfolios were complete, two student affairs administrators responsible for overseeing the program—the dean and assistant dean for student learning and engagement—met with each faculty member to discuss the portfolio, the past year, and goals for the next academic year.

Although faculty members may have encountered a wide variety of student interactions outside of class, they enthusiastically approached the opportunity to live with students as a way to more meaningfully enact their existing convictions about teaching and learning.

A more in-depth review of the portfolios of the six faculty-in-residence who agreed to participate in the study was used to develop the research questions for the second phase of data collection, in which six faculty-in-residence responded in writing to the following questions:

1. In reflecting upon your service as a faculty member living in residence, how, if at all, has the experience influenced your pedagogy, both inside and outside the classroom? Please be specific.
2. In reflecting upon your service as a faculty member living in residence, how, if at all, has the experience shaped your philosophy of education or theories about student learning?
3. To what extent has serving as a faculty-in-residence influenced, changed, or strengthened your understanding of your role as a faculty member?
4. In thinking about your tenure as a faculty-in-residence, will you please describe two experiences or moments that you believe have been most important to you (however you want to define "important")?
5. What, in your opinion, has been the most unexpected and surprising outcome to emerge from your experience as a faculty member living in residence?

Researchers preferred collecting data through written responses as opposed to personal interviews for two reasons. First, the available literature concerning participants in faculty-in-residence programs is based solely on personal reflections. To build upon existing research, this study sought to combine personal portfolios with an empirical investigation of what faculty members learn from their experience of living with students. Second, the researchers concluded that asking faculty to record their narratives in writing on their own schedule could lead to more in-depth, reflective responses than would the immediate responses required during an in-person interview (Creswell, 2007; Richards & Morse, 2007).

Data Analysis

After reviewing the portfolios for phase one of the research and using them to formulate the research questions for the second phase, the researchers analyzed data from phase two in three steps. In step one, four different researchers utilized open coding to identify and label key portions of the response transcripts (Creswell, 2007). In step two, the research team discussed similarities and differences in the codes and resolved any differences by checking codes against the qualitative data (Patton, 1990). In step three, the researchers grouped codes together to form themes. These themes were then combined to construct a model that illustrated in general terms how faculty members appeared to learn and develop through living in residence.

FINDINGS

The findings led to the creation of the Faculty-in-Residence Development Model, which describes important ways that faculty are influenced by and learn from their faculty-in-residence experiences. The five themes of the model are as follows: Opportunities, Means, Roles, Benefits, and Outcomes (see Table 1). *Opportunities* refers to the ways that live-in positions allow faculty to enact their intrinsic mo-

tivations to educate. *Means* describes the ways in which faculty-in-residence implement their philosophies of teaching. These opportunities and means lead to new *roles* for the faculty-in-residence, both in relation to their students and to their colleagues. The *benefits* theme reveals how faculty progress in both personal and professional ways. Finally, faculty change in meaningful ways, reflected in the fifth part of the model, *outcomes*.

Table 1

Faculty-in-Residence Development Model

Codes	Code groupings	Themes
Enact teaching philosophy		Opportunities
Enact calling		
Employ motivations/desires		
Interactions with students	People	Means
Relationships		
Non-academic discussions		
Collaboration		
Physical environment	Environment	
Community/living-learning		
Informal interactions	Time	
Constant presence		
Multiple roles played		Roles
Impact on family		Benefits
Recruitment to discipline		
Personal reward		
Satisfaction		
Development		Outcomes
Learning		
Deeper holistic commitment		

Faculty learned that the boundaries between academic and non-academic discussions became constructively blurred as they interacted with all parts of a student's life: "The ability to help students explore some of the answers to . . . questions and challenges is possible when you are given the opportunity to know the students on a level deeper than that typically available in the classroom."

Opportunities

Faculty articulated an intrinsic motivation and philosophy of education that served as a foundation for their choosing to live on campus. Although faculty members may have encountered a wide variety of student interactions outside of class, they enthusiastically approached the opportunity to live with students as a way to more meaningfully enact their existing convictions about teaching and learning. Through this faculty-in-residence role, faculty members were able to implement their teaching philosophies to a greater extent. One faculty-in-residence articulated this recurring theme particularly well:

> My sense of professional contribution has been unquestionably strengthened through my participation in a faculty-in-residence initiative . . . it would be fair to say that much of my prior professorial career left me disappointed at lost opportunities to fulfill what I knew good and well to be educationally sound practice. Selling my quiet home . . . and moving my family into [the residence hall] has enabled me to engage students in an altogether fulfilling manner.

Another faculty-in-residence experienced first-hand that learning has no boundaries:

> I was reminded in concrete ways of something I had only really known in theory before: that learning happens constantly, anywhere, anytime. When I was only on campus in daylight hours, I witnessed only classroom, lab, or library learning. . . . With the faculty-in-residence experience I have been able to see and be a part of what is going on in the evenings . . . in my apartment, in the [residence hall] lobby, or in the dining halls. I saw more anytime/anywhere learning.

Astin's (1993a) Input-Environment-Output (I-E-O) model describes how student input connects with institutional environments to produce student outcomes. In a similar fashion, faculty entered these roles with their own input, leading them to find more significant opportunities to employ their motivations to foster learning.

Means

Faculty-in-residence also conveyed how the physical environment, expectations of community, collaboration with housing and residence life professionals, and their increased availability all led to more interaction which in turn led to deeper relationships with students. The data revealed three main means of faculty-in-

residence learning that were presented by the opportunity to serve in a live-in role: people, the environment, and time. Regarding people, faculty often credited their frequent, informal interactions with students as leading to more meaningful conversations. Faculty learned that the boundaries between academic and non-academic discussions became constructively blurred as they interacted with all parts of a student's life: "The ability to help students explore some of the answers to . . . questions and challenges is possible when you are given the opportunity to know the students on a level deeper than that typically available in the classroom." Bringing classroom work into the community was especially salient when students who were enrolled in the faculty member's class also lived in the same residence hall:

> Having access to students outside of the classroom enables the boundaries of the classroom to melt away. . . . There have been multiple occasions that my students who also live in [this residence hall] have sought me out to extend a discussion from class, to ask questions about assignments, or to ask my opinion about a topic relevant to my discipline . . . I have been able to mentor those students in real life situations that likely have been more meaningful and memorable than any classroom exercise.

Perhaps students gain little from the social interactions with faculty alone (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2004), but faculty and students learn that these interactions are the doorways to deeper academic and career conversations and more rewarding relationships.

The environment provided the means to foster a culture of learning. Placing a faculty member in a residence hall created expectations for both the students and the faculty member; faculty members engaged with students in ways that connect to person-environment theory, utilizing the surrounding conditions to encourage student involvement and to help dispel the awkwardness that can result from student-faculty interaction (Strange & Banning, 2001). In short, faculty learned to relate with students in new ways, while also giving students experience with multiple types of interactions:

> By living with them, I learn their lingo and their popular culture, and I can use elements of that to draw comparisons to the past. . . . I have learned more about the life of a college student by living that life myself, and I can bring those experiences into the classroom and make history appear more relevant to my students.

Of all the means, the most important learning tool for faculty appeared to be the increased amount of time they spent with students. Time spent allowed interactions to develop naturally. One participant stated,

> Having so many more out of class opportunities to share who we are and what we believe, by saying it and living it, allows us opportunity, and in a sense MORE [capitalization in original] time, to get our message across than those who cease their interaction with students "at the bell."

Faculty overall felt that the constant connections with people, the culture the environment fostered, and the increase in time available to spend with students all helped to show them how to foster holistic learning in students.

Roles

Faculty members assumed multiple roles, each helping to shape the way they perceived student learning and development. In their work on student-faculty relationships, Baker and Griffin (2010) described three distinct faculty roles for student success along a continuum—advisor, mentor, and developer—each with an increasing level of commitment and impact. Faculty-in-residence in this study appeared to progress along this continuum, and living with students led them into the third role: developers. According to Baker and Griffin, "a developer engages in knowledge development, information sharing, and support as students set and achieve goals" (p. 5). Concerning knowledge development, the faculty-in-residence position allowed participants to become advocates for their disciplines. Even if not recruiting students to change majors, faculty were pleased to talk to students of other majors about the importance of the faculty member's discipline in society. For instance, a theater arts professor enjoyed sharing with non-majors his love for the arts:

> My tendency as a faculty member over the years has been to sequester myself in my own department, seeing only my departmental colleagues, teaching courses only for theatre arts majors, and seldom visiting buildings outside of the [fine arts building]. Serving as a faculty-in-residence has prompted me to see my role as one that is relevant to the entire university and to students and colleagues of multiple disciplines. . . . I more often see my teaching now as a practice that extends beyond my own discipline.

As one participant explained, providing spaces and opportunities for student-faculty interaction led naturally to the faculty member's role as developer:

> University culture is different and strange to [first-year students]. I saw them practicing intellectual conversations, sometimes awkwardly or overdone, until they got it just right. I saw young women, starting from a place of silence, as described by Belenky et al. [referring to Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1997)], in the first week of school, not in the classroom setting, as I had witnessed before, but at my dining room table. I saw those same young women finding their voices by spring semester, as they "held their own" in conversations, with confidence growing.

Although faculty-in-residence often found their new roles satisfying, taking on additional responsibilities was often a challenge. One faculty member expressed well what several others reported:

> Beyond our immediate discipline area, I believe we are also to model desirable character traits, such as commitment, quality, selflessness, concern. . . . In some ways, this is a daunting list of expectations, one that can overwhelm us if we're not careful. Add to that additional expectations such as publication and other scholarship, committee work, etc.—not to mention seeking tenure.

Student interaction with faculty in their family settings presented further challenges, particularly for female faculty whose students might equate them with the "dorm mom." One female professor explained this struggle:

> I will say I struggled to be seen by the students as "professor" rather than as

> "mother" because they saw me as a wife of a professor and as a mother to my daughter. So while they immediately addressed my husband with his title of Dr. or Professor, the students tended to call me "Mrs." rather than by the same title of Dr. or Professor. This was a new experience for me and again it reminded me of how our various roles and positions affect what students are willing to learn from us. . . . When we are seen living our whole lives, eating, exercising, parenting, living life, our other roles (wife/mother) may eclipse our professional roles in the eyes of students. This can happen to men as well, but I think women professors are much more vulnerable to this.

Although sometimes daunting, the new roles that developed from faculty living in residence taught them what it means to educate beyond merely what the traditional professor role allows.

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Benefits

Faculty reported many benefits of engaging with students, resulting in more learning for the faculty. The perceived benefits from living in residence went beyond professional to personal as well. For instance, faculty expected that their families would impact the community of students, but they did not anticipate how much the community would benefit their families:

> I have been surprised by how remarkably well integrated my professional service and familial life have become. At the time we moved to the [residence hall], my son was . . . a mere toddler with rudimentary language skills. My wife and I wondered whether or not we would find it a strain upon him or upon our family unit. Any concerns or doubts that we entertained were utterly dashed by an experience of unparalleled personal opportunities and socially engaging experiences for our whole family. . . . Our young son is thriving, our family is thriving . . .

In addition, university life helped faculty members in their roles as parents; they anticipated their own children's futures and learned from the college students surrounding them.

> While I am raising an adolescent daughter I am reading a lot about adolescence as a stage of development. Although our first-year students are on the tail end of their adolescence, much of the same relationship dynamic holds: They need us and don't need us . . . They confuse us and confuse themselves about when to need and not need. First-year students face that dilemma head on as they feel very independent all of a sudden, but not quite sure what to do when they discover their vulnerabilities in that independence.

Faculty no doubt decided to live in residential communities because of what they could contribute to students and to the community as a whole. However, faculty were pleasantly surprised at how much they were learning about their own families by living with students.

Investment in faculty-in-residence programs necessitates more than merely placing faculty in these live-in roles. . . . Faculty-in-residence programs are successful when they cultivate meaningful and substantive relationships between faculty and students, leading to learning and development for all involved. Housing and residence life professionals can play a key role in that learning.

Outcomes

The first four parts of the model—opportunities, means, roles, and benefits—combined to produce three significant learning outcomes for faculty-in-residence: development as educators, further understanding of teaching and learning, and a deeper commitment to connecting classroom experiences to life outside the classroom. Through living with students, educators rediscovered that learning occurs best when institutions help to encourage holistic learning and development. Faculty indicated a renewed understanding of how to teach by connecting the personal narratives of students to the learning process (Nash, 2008). They simultaneously learned about students and the complexity of their lives and about themselves and what they enjoy in teaching. Faculty entered their roles with a desire for holistic learning, but living with students clearly underscored the development that occurs when in-class and out-of-class learning are integrated.

Many respondents noted increased opportunities to contribute to students' growth and offer support in significant ways. This occurred simply by living alongside students and being available to them:

> The most unexpected and surprising outcome for me is how often I have the opportunity to influence a student's life. Every time I encounter students, I have the chance to help them. . . . The best part of all is that none of these encounters are ever planned, and they usually happen in the oddest places like the stairwell, the laundry room, or the dining hall.

Taken together, the overlapping accounts from faculty living in residence clearly demonstrated a self-reported positive change in both their professional paradigms as educators and their personal lives. These changes were not isolated, but rather seemed to penetrate varying aspects of their lives. In other words, the outcomes went beyond becoming better faculty-in-residence to becoming better faculty as a whole.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore how faculty learn and develop as a result of intentional, live-in roles in residence halls. The Faculty-in-Residence Development Model and its five themes (Opportunities-Means-Roles-Benefits-Outcomes) offer a new way of understanding the potential changes faculty can experience in their own development as a result of collaborative efforts between student and academic affairs. The findings complement existing literature on how these partnerships benefit students (Astin, 1977, 1993b; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2004) by examining how such partnerships also help faculty improve in their roles as educators. In light of recent critiques of higher education that denounce poor pedagogy by faculty (Hacker & Dreifus, 2010), higher education administrators can use the findings of this study to advocate for how faculty-in-residence programs strengthen teaching in both curricular and cocurricular contexts.

Investment in faculty-in-residence programs necessitates more than merely placing faculty in these live-in roles. As Magolda (2005) cautions, forming such collaborations can be so challenging that the initial outcomes desired from the programs can get lost. Faculty-in-residence programs are successful when they cultivate meaningful and substantive relationships between faculty and students, leading to learning and development for all involved. Housing and residence life professionals can play a key role in that learning. The implications of this study lead to recommendations for higher education and student affairs administrators. Specifically, this research illuminates three areas of action for housing and residence life professionals: (1) recognize ways to help faculty-in-residence learn and develop in their roles through the use of reflection, (2) identify how the experiential learning of faculty members influences broader advocacy of issues pertaining to student affairs, and (3) improve current assessment practices of faculty-in-residence programs.

Students will learn best from faculty members who reflect upon themselves, their roles, and their impact, and housing and residence life professionals can help faculty discover what they are learning from the students they serve. In the classroom, self-reflection is an important tool by which faculty help students learn from their own experiences (Fink, 2003). The same is true in the residential community. As was the case with the required annual portfolio process for these faculty-in-residence, self-reflection can be an important tool by which housing and residence life professionals help faculty become aware of what they are learning from their experiences living with students. As faculty strive to develop in their roles, self-reflection can illuminate areas that need to be improved and, in fact, can accelerate the progress of such programs through purposeful engagement and conversation. This study illustrates how housing and residence life professionals can join with students to help further develop faculty educators.

Formalized faculty-in-residence assessment and reflection processes can also serve as a launching point for fundamental conversations that equip residence hall directors to be educators who help catalyze the learning and development of faculty-in-residence. In their

portfolios, faculty noted an appreciation for the expertise of their hall directors in promoting a better student experience. Housing and residence life professionals can utilize their knowledge of college student development to help faculty members create and implement goals, thereby promoting desired student outcomes through the development of the faculty-in-residence themselves. Such processes allow student affairs professionals to help faculty in their live-in roles. Faculty reflection should also serve their peers—other faculty-in-residence and those faculty interested in student learning outside the classroom. Colleagues should not be left to learn through their own experiences alone; faculty should teach one another by sharing what they learn from students.

Faculty reflection can also enable administrators to see areas of interest and concern for faculty. Undoubtedly, faculty and staff contribute different perspectives and skill sets. Student affairs professionals must understand faculty culture and recognize the types of professional struggles that they encounter. Those in housing and residence life can help faculty navigate the new cultures and paradigms encountered upon moving into the residence halls.

Findings from this study indicate that faculty members who can articulate what they have learned may be able to draw upon that learning more readily and could, therefore, be much stronger advocates of such collaborations across campus, particularly between student and academic affairs. This advocacy happens in both formal and informal ways. Faculty-in-residence can inspire their colleagues within and across discipline boundaries, encourage and invite more faculty involvement within halls, and influence campus decision-makers by continuing such advocacy within their circles of influence. For instance, one faculty member who participated in this study later presented to the institution's board of trustees on the educational value of on-campus residential environments for students.

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LIMITATIONS

Certain limitations of the study should be considered. The single site of this research and the relatively small sample size make the findings context-bound, so generalizations or inferences to other institutions or faculty-in-residence should be made with care. Also, the narrative approach is challenging and requires extensive knowledge of the researchers to "restory" the account accurately (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). Although a level of trust had been

developed between the researchers and the participants before conducting the study, another limitation is that faculty could have withheld negative information from their narratives because they did not want to disappoint their student affairs colleagues. Not conducting interviews in person did not allow the researchers to probe for qualifiers or more negative examples. Therefore, the Faculty-in-Residence Development Model constructed from these findings is not meant to be an explanation of all faculty-in-residence experiences. Instead, this model is meant to contribute to the existing literature by offering a possible empirical explanation of faculty experiences, with the expectation that future research can and should further develop it.

CONCLUSION

Although extensive research is available on how increased student-faculty interaction benefits students, there is a surprising paucity of research on how such interactions influence faculty members. This study sought to examine what faculty learn by living in residence with students. Living with students gives faculty the opportunity to further develop as educators through increased interactions, playing new roles, and experiencing a holistic learning environment. In essence, faculty receive from these partnerships in addition to giving to them. Housing and residence life professionals can further advance their faculty-in-residence programs by helping faculty members reflect upon what they are learning from their live-in roles and by teaching faculty how to apply that learning for the benefit of students.

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Discussion Questions

1. Student affairs professionals typically study college student development. Faculty members come from diverse academic backgrounds, many of which have no relationship to the disciplines of education or student development. What information should faculty-in-residence come to the experience with? Should they prepare in any specific way for their new role? If so, how? What key concepts or tips would you share with or teach your faculty member as they integrate into the residence hall community?

2. If a campus is underprepared or unable to support a faculty-in-residence program, what are some low-risk activities or events that happen in the residence halls where faculty could share their academic expertise or personal interests with students? Do you think the faculty-in-residence model is the best way to bridge the gap between student affairs and academics? Are there other models that could be equally or more effective?

3. This study illustrates many benefits related to living in residence. However, the authors acknowledge that "faculty could have withheld negative information from their narratives because they did not want to disappoint their student affairs colleagues." What possible drawbacks might be associated with the faculty-in-residence experience? What challenges or frustrations do you envision a faculty member would experience in a faculty-in-residence program? What solutions would you employ to counter the drawbacks, challenges, or frustrations?

4. Recognizing that the creation of a strong faculty-in-residence program takes time, effort, and committed faculty and student affairs collaboration, what key stakeholders on campus should be aware of the faculty benefits of living in the residence halls? What role can you play to facilitate discussions regarding faculty-in-residence programs on campus? Discuss your assumptions regarding faculty and why they may or may not be interested in participating in a faculty-in-residence program. How would you go about learning whether your assumptions are true or false?

5. Reflect on the current out-of-class relationship between faculty and students on campus and identify the places where faculty and students interact. Are those interactions occurring near or in residence halls? If not, who would you approach and how would you approach someone about changing the location of the current interactions outside of the classroom to inside the residence halls?

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